

Listen to the voices of these parents.

Their words, spoken at focus groups across the state and supplemented by data and research points, inform us of specific problems that Virginia families face. This issue brief is one of a series that highlights policy recommendations to remedy specific problems.

“I saw in the brochure that it says in order to be eligible for this program, you could not have insurance for the last six months. Why would I let my child go without insurance for six months?”

Recent policy changes

have made it simpler than ever for families in Virginia to enroll their children in Medicaid and FAMIS, yet significant gaps in coverage still exist. One particular barrier is the gap between the time a family submits an application and the time when the child becomes covered. Another hole in coverage is created by the six-month waiting period before children are eligible for FAMIS after being previously insured.

Quotes from parents

- “I contacted social services to see if they could help me with Medicaid, and they tell me—there are hundreds of cases in front of you. I have applied but she was like, well, we can take 45 days, and it is probably going to be over 45 days....I have three kids. All three are asthmatic and have food allergies. So, I am like – what am I going to do in 45 days or longer?”
- “And two weeks after I had her [my baby] I filed for child support...the one I just had has been hospitalized four times since she has been born. And now they are trying to throw all of these hospital bills at me because she hasn't had Medicaid. And I called her worker to find out why....I have done everything that you [the social worker] have asked me to do. So what is the problem now? 'Oh, I got your paperwork, I just haven't had time to do it. I guess I'll get to you when I can.' She has the paperwork. But my daughter is not on. And they say that if she doesn't hurry up and get on soon I am going to have to pay for at least one of her visits.”
- “I heard you have to be one year without insurance before you can apply.”
“Well that's dumb.”
“Of course it is dumb, because kids are getting sick.”

DATA/RESEARCH

- As of December 1, 2002, an estimated 98,071 low-income children in Virginia, who would be eligible for Medicaid or FAMIS, are uninsured.
- Gaps in coverage caused by waiting periods or by delayed processing of applications by state or local officials leave children without insurance coverage and without a medical home. While this is risky for any child because of the chance of illness or injury, it is particularly difficult when children have chronic health issues, such as asthma.
- According to the Kaiser Commission on Medicaid and the Uninsured, “children in poor health miss more school days and have lower cognitive development. Lower educational attainment due to poor childhood health contributes to lower wages and lower labor force participation, which increase the likelihood of not being insured as an adult, thereby increasing the odds of continued poor health as an adult.”

REMEDIES

- *Adopt Presumptive Eligibility.*

With this practice, a limited number of designated entities (like hospital emergency rooms or health clinics) can determine children’s eligibility on the spot based on preliminary information. A more thorough review of eligibility is conducted thereafter, but it allows children to receive services immediately – and providers to be reimbursed for those services.

Presumptive eligibility can also be used to expedite enrollment of newborns by allowing a woman to submit the paperwork for coverage for her child while she is still pregnant. In this way, medical costs associated with the birth can be covered, saving money currently expended on indigent care.

Nine states have adopted presumptive eligibility in their Medicaid programs, five have adopted it in their separate SCHIP programs, and six have adopted it in both their Medicaid and separate SCHIP programs. Not all of these states have begun implementing this policy.

- *Remove the six month waiting period.*

Virginia requires that children applying for FAMIS must be without insurance for six months before they are eligible for FAMIS. This waiting period creates gaps in coverage for families when children still get sick and have no health coverage. (The waiting period was reduced from twelve to six months in 2001.)

While 38 states originally imposed waiting periods, the federal government does not require them. States merely have to take reasonable steps to ensure that the SCHIP program is not “crowding out” private insurance – meaning families are not dropping their private insurance to get state-sponsored insurance. The federal government has now acknowledged that waiting periods can be a barrier to receiving needed health care.

Eighteen states currently do not impose waiting periods for their SCHIP programs, and Virginia’s waiting period is longer than that of thirty five other states.

Voices for Virginia’s Children

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For additional information, contact Voices for Virginia’s Children.